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THE HOLMS OF WOODWICK

A LEGEND OF SHETLAND

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BY
A.D. HALLAN

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“O Love, my Love,
Here is our grave!”

THE HOLMS OF WOODWICK

A LEGEND OF SHETLAND

BY

A. D. H. ALLAN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

C. M. WATTS

LONDON

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

WATERS FROM DEEP SPRINGS,

3/6

Messrs. George Routledge & Co.

THE NAIAD, 2/6

From the Author.

DEDICATION

To W. A. I.

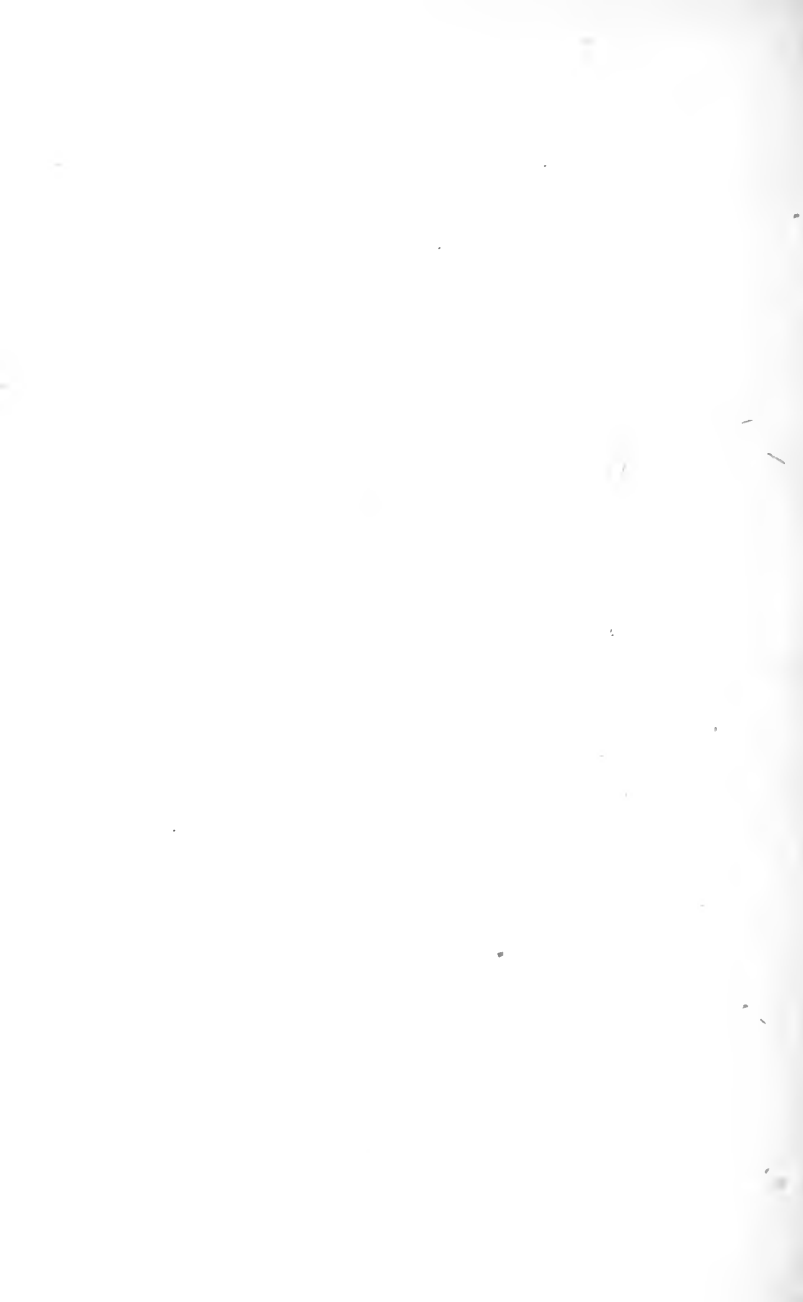
Talk of your mountains in the North so free ;
Tell of wild waves, or of the land-locked voe :
Conjure me visions of a wide-flung sea
Where guardian Dreadnoughts in procession go.

And tell me—in that calm and measured tone—
Do hearts beat strong, and pulses steady, there ?
Or do your hardships chill you to the bone,
And leave you like your hillsides, scathed and bare ?

Deep in the flinty rock of primal birth,
Deep in the weather-bitten, tree-less soil,
Broods there no germinating mother-earth ?
No tardy prize to bless the labourer's toil ?

Can you but show me true affection's flowers
Blooming like sea-pinks on a wind-blown crag,
I'll brave with you the winter's stormiest hours,
And build beside your cormorant and shag.

Do human hearts, where shag and skua give
Brief elemental loves, show less or more ?
Some day I'll find the island where you live
And seek my answer on its foam-flecked shore.



SCENE :—The island of Unst, Shetland.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ERIC ERICSSON	-	-	a udaller of Woodwick	
EJNAR	-	-	his son	
HELGA	-	-	his daughter	
LAURENCE BRUCE (Senr.)			a noble Scot in exile	} of Muness Castle.
LAURENCE	-	-	his son	
JAMES STUART	-	-	kinsman to Bruce	
CAPTAIN BORAS	-	-	a foreign trader	
FALSTER	-	-	his shipmate	
OLAF	-	-	of Pettista	} udallers
ANLAF	-	-	of Norwick	
GERDA	-	-	sister of Anlaf	
VAILA	-	-	of Baltä, friend of Ericsson	



The Holms of Woodwick

SCENE I

A hut on the shore of Woodwick. The udaller, Eric Ericsson, enters with his son Ejnar. His daughter, Helga, sits knitting before a peat fire. She rises as they enter.

ERICSSON—

Ah, here is Helga ! Child, make up the fire,
And brew me drink : Ejnar and I have come
Weary from Baltasound. The harbour there
Is lively with the shipping ; for the spring
Has brought the traders early, and the hauls
Of fish are large. So there is much to see,
Much that amuses. If the day were free
From business matters—if one's mind could rest
An hour or two from worry, such a time
Would be a holiday indeed. I found
Enjoyment hard without you—so, my child,
I said to Ejnar, “ Not three suns shall rise
Ere this brave show gladden your sister's sight ! ”
You are too quiet, Helga : it is time
A girl your age—and not uncomely, eh ?—
Saw more of life. In Woodwick here, we men
Are dull enough, God knows : and womenfolk
Simply stagnate. So put your porridge on,
And—supper done—bring out your finery
Such as it is (perhaps the very dress
Your Mother wore, when in the days gone by
I took her there : the necklace that I bought
From a fat rascal of a Dutchman : yes,
The ear-rings also : I remember all
As it were yesterday).

Then, as you mend
And cut and alter garments, I will tell
More of the day's adventure.

HELGA (*delightedly*)—

Father dear,

I will have supper ready in a trice.
Oh, what a pleasure it will be to see
The foreigners, and hear their curious speech :
Ejnar has told me of the lovely things
These traders bring ; the satin, velvet, silks
Of every shade : the gold and silver work :
And all the sweetmeats.

Ejnar, will you come
And lift this pot for me ?

(*Exit Ericsson.*)

I remember well
My other visits, in the far-off days,
When on my pony, Freya, I would ride
To Balta with you. Cousin Olaf there
Would take me round and show me everything.
And once I lost my way amongst the crowd—
Olaf and I got parted—and I wept
Until a friendly boy discovered me
And brought me back. Olaf was vexed with me,
And angry with the boy—I knew not why—
I sometimes wonder who he was—so tall,
And dark and courteous. If we ever met
Again in Balta I should recognise
Him easily.

There, now set the plates
In readiness, and Father's largest mug :
He shall have all the best to-night. I wish
Our darling Mother had not gone so soon,
And left us all in sadness.

But to-night
No tears nor lamentations ! I am here
To do my mother's work—to carry on
Her loving duties. You and he must toil
To keep a useless girl, unless indeed
Something of her bright spirit fall on me
As in the night I dream of her, and teach
My faltering spirit how to fill her place.

EJNAR—

Hush, little sister ! Nor one moment think
We grudge to keep you. You are all in all
To both of us—the apple of our eye.

Listen ! One stormy night beyond the bar,
When the steep Holms were lashed with blinding
spray,

And through their arches surged the booming seas,
And inky blackness made the night a hell,
My father, straining o'er the bows, to ward
Against tang-covered skerries, cried to me
That mother's wraith was walking on the waves.
It turned my blood cold ; but I called aloud
Through the wild wind-gusts, " Father, dear, she
comes

To say that Helga watches safe at home,
And keeps a glowing hearth for our return."
His terror passed : he came astern again,
And took the rudder in his giant's grasp
With one word, " Helga " !

Yes, he loves the sound
Of your sweet name : how much more, think you,
He loves your face, your voice, your clinging arms.
I can be much to him ; yet he would live
And toil as usual if I went away,
Bought my own ship, and sailed to Swedish ports :
But if you were not here he could not live.

HELGA (*running to her brother and kissing him*)—

I do believe you ! Hsh ! He comes again.

(*Enter Ericsson.*)

Father, your chair is waiting, and your shoes
Hot from the fire ; and I have brewed some sack
Will make your head reel, I am sure ! Do come !
Why do you stand so long, and stare at me
As if I were a kelpie ?

ERICSSON—

Why, my dear,
It is because you are so beautiful ;
A very daughter of our Viking race,
And sweetest maid in Hjaltland. If my head
Is like to reel, it will not be with sack !
Ah, little Helga, time will bring but no ! . .
To supper first.

(*All sit down, and the Father describes the day's doings.
Supper over, he dismisses his son on an errand,
and draws Helga on to his knee.*)

B

ERICSSON—

Come, little one ! But, there ! I must not call
 You little any longer. I am old :
 Still strong, but ageing : you are growing up.
 But never shall I see you otherwise
 Than as my little Helga, just so high,
 With twisting curls, and lisping baby words,
 Mingling the frolics of a six months' kid
 With all the dignity of summers ten.
 I see you standing by your mother's wheel
 In the long winter's night, your eyes a-dance
 With wonder and excitement at my tales
 Of Norse adventure, sagas that record
 Haarfager's prowess, battles with the Pict,
 Or witchments of the trowies. I recall
 The night we lost you, when the raging storm
 Drove snow and rain against our cottage door,
 When thunder of the sea and heavens combined
 To terrorise us. Darling, what mad pain
 You caused your mother then ! With fear-born
 strength

I forced my way up to the storm-swept riggs
 And called till I was hoarse. At last, so wet,
 So cold, I found you in the planty crewe,
 Hugging the lamb you risked your life to save.
 You'll never run away again, my heart ?
 It costs too much in anguish, little one !
 Yes, little Helga, I must call you that ;
 For you should never come to womanhood
 Had I my way !

But tell me now, my love,
 Why this fair face, usually wreathed in smiles,
 Wears just a touch of sadness ? Are you dull ?
 Do you stagnate in Woodwick, as I said
 Just now to Ejnar ? Have you at a glance,
 The winking of an eye, sprung from the lake
 Of child's content, and pressed the flowery mead
 Of youth's ambitions ? Ah, you need a mate,
 A playmate, fellow-voyager in worlds
 Of life's enchantments. Helga, is it so ?

HELGA (*energetically*)—

Father, how can you talk such nonsense ! No,
 I am not dull. And Woodwick is not dull !

Our valley may be wild and desolate,
 But it is wild and beautiful ! I love
 The shimmering sea when summer's mellow haze
 Lies far upon its face. I love the storms
 That sweep in terrible onslaught madly
 Over the Holms, and drive the angered sea
 Against the banks, until its briny tears
 Fall inland on the heath.

I love the hills,
 I love the dales, when cloud and sunlight chase
 Each other over them. For just as then
 They glow or dull in turn, so does my heart
 Grow bright or dull with them.

I have my moods :
 Moods when I skip and caper like an elf ;
 Moods when I crouch and think, and watch and
 dream.

But neither means stagnation. To the full
 I drink the cup of Shetland's beauty ; to the full
 I drain the vial of her cleansing wrath.
 I want naught else than just to live and die
 In my dear Woodwick !

ERICSSON (*playfully*)—

Laugh on, child, and dream :
 Laugh at the fantasies that crown your thoughts,
 Dream of great things to come ! Ere long, I know,
 You will be begging me for liberty
 To leave the sea, the hill, the dale, aye, all
 Just to be near your mate.

And listen, child !
 I have met one who, hearing both of us
 Sing your loud praises, is aflame to see
 Her whom I treasure ; is agog to find
 My paragon of beauty.

When to-night
 Shall imperceptibly resolve into the dawn
 And call itself to-morrow, I shall go
 To meet this friend—for friend he surely is—
 And satisfy his curiosity.

Ejnar will wake you early. So, to rest !
 And if love knocks, admit him to your dreams.

(*He kisses her, and sets her free.*)

HELGA (*alone and unrobing*)—

These are strange words of Father's—"if love knocks
Admit him to your dreams." Do I not know
What love is yet? Have I no kindly thought
Or tender impulse? Nay, I love too well,
I cannot find it in my heart to hate:
I love all things created: Love, I think
Is part of me, or I am part of Love.
Love is the sky, the sun, the hills, the moss,
The sea, the gull, the peerie burn, and Me!
"Admit him to your dreams . ." these are strange
words!

(*Going to the window.*)

Good night, dear waters, rippling to the moon!
Good night, dear Vallafeld, and Tonga Cliff!
Good night, old Holms of Woodwick, standing there
Like sentinels to guard my lovely home!
I love you all, I know you all love me;
Good night!

SCENE II

Baltasound.

Early morning : boats jostling one another : native and foreign fishermen shouting excitedly : constant movement. Both shores thronged with men, women and children, buying, selling, haggling over prices.

VOICES—

Make way ! Make way there !

Why such needless haste ?

Who dares to push me to the side ?

Fat ox,

Get out of the way !

Never for you !

Look out !

I stand on my own legs !

They are too weak

To hold you up :

Ha ! ha !

You senseless swine !

Ha ! ha ! Soft is the bottom of your boat,

But softer still are you !

OTHER VOICES—

The price—you say ?

Well, if I sailed the Arctic seas a year

I could not get another such as this !

You will not find its like in kingdoms three.

You will not grudge—riksdalers—fifty, say—

Nay, but you jest ! The value is not ten !

Say forty, then, and done !

Sheer robbery !

(A boat at the back of the bay. Captain Boras, a young trader, and his mate, Falster.)

BORAS—

I have done well this trip : my pouch is full

Of little silver pieces : and my stock

Is not yet quite exhausted. Let the rest

Go fight for custom in the copper crowd :

My aim is higher. When their lungs are tired
 We will slip quietly along the shore,
 Land with our wares, and mingle with the folk
 Who seem too proud to haggle : whose chief thought
 Is of enjoyment : who have gold perhaps
 Beneath their coats : converse with them, and learn
 Their wants and likings : and, by Odin's beard,
 I am no merchant if I cannot help
 To satisfy their wants !

Then as time draws
 Stealthily on, and bells begin to sound
 From yonder kirk, we'll go and humbly pray
 That Easter morning may be bright for us,
 And each succeeding day ; that no fell storm
 Shatter us ere we reach our fatherland.
 Falster, I do not know that I desire so much
 To make for home.

FALSTER—

How then ! Is Baltasound
 So homely ? Can these stony hills compare
 With our rich dales ? What charm have they for
 you,
 Who but a little while ago were sick
 As any girl for home ? Aha ! I think
 Some spell has caught you ! Some bewitching eye,
 Blue as a fiord when the ripples sleep,
 Has looked in yours ! Come, Captain, come,
 confess !

BORAS—

Shrewdly you guess, my friend ; not wholly wrong
 Your quick surmise.

Truly, I have not met
 The witch of whom you speak : nor had I thought
 Of womankind at all till yesterday.
 Hearken !

I left you, yestere'en, when sleep
 Had overcome you : and I clambered up
 The stony pathway of the barren Heog
 For the sheer love of climbing : and for joy
 Of gazing on the sea outstretched below ;
 And then sat dreamily : until there passed

Two men, tall islanders—father and son,
 Bound, as they said, for Woodwick. And they stood
 And chatted for awhile ; and let me ask
 Many a question on their home and ways.
 I heard tales of strange customs ; of beliefs,
 Of feuds, and phantoms : gathered that their house
 Was Norse in origin, and once of noble stock.
 The youth was lingering ; but his father said
 “ Our Helga will be waiting ! ”

At the name
 My heart, friend Falster, seemed to stand awhile—
 ’Twas like the stirring whisper in the sails
 As the good boat flies seaward. And I, bold,
 Bold with a sudden daring, found my feet,
 And turned and walked beside them : “ Just as far,”
 I urged, “ As Baliasta ! ”

Freely I spoke
 Of many things ; of home, my youth, my love
 For life’s adventures on the crested wave :
 Spoke of that nest-egg, Falster, laid aside
 With unremitting increase for the day
 When I should build a house, and take a wife,
 And get me sturdy sons.

“ But who,” I asked,
 “ Is Helga, pray ? And have you other sons
 As tall and strong as this ? ”

I cannot tell
 Even to you, friend Falster, more than that :
 His praise of that bright angel in his house
 Must be for ever sacred, prison-pent,
 And memory-locked.

Then, where the lonely scoord
 Rises to fall again, I said farewell.
 The elder man, with honest eyes alight,
 Bade me account his friendship wholly won ;
 Said he would ask me further, but his cot
 Boasted no space for hospitality.
 “ To-morrow we shall meet again,” he said ;
 “ We’ll find a friendly house, and you shall come
 And dine with us.”

My mind was strangely stirred :
 And all my will cried to him silently
 “ Bring Helga with you ! ”

(He pauses, and his companion remains silent, while the waves lap at the boat. By and bye he proceeds :—

So to-night I start
Upon this great adventure. I have loved
The unknown, unexplored, from childhood up ;
And it has been a training for this quest.
Life calls within for love. Either my Life
Shall win its goal, or Love shall drown my Life !

SCENE III

Muness Castle.

Laurence Bruce, a refugee, banished from Scotland for political reasons, talks with a visitor, James Stuart.

BRUCE—

Ay, they may banish, but they cannot tame me.
I am of noble blood, and pour hot scorn
On all their upstart pettiness : my will
May not suffice to gain and keep my own,
Against the force of twenty thousand knaves,
But it can nurse its pride and dignity,
Go through the end of life unfaltering,
And reach the grave uncrushed.

So here I stand
A broken goblet ; but, my friend, look close,
And see a marvel : not one costly drop
Of all the fiery liquor that it held
As yet is spilled. My fate shall turn the draught
From sweet and crimson wine to inky gall,
And they shall drink it.

Here I build my nest,
Here like an Arctic cormorant, upon a crag :
Here shall the rude north cradle me and mine :
Here shall the cold blasts rock our wrath to sleep
Only to waken later to a fiercer life !
Here will I hide my new-embodied soul—
My heart resuscitated to the flush of youth—
The fruit of my may-be-unworthy loins,
Laurence, my son.

Yonder see him come,
Leaping across the peaty bog ! There's hope,
My last hope in that lad : my weapon, he,
Polished and keen—with twice his father's fire—
Against the miserable, yelping crowd
That bayed me out of Scotland.

Stuart, come.
We'll meet him at the gate.

Many a plan
Surges within my brain for that dear boy,

Who shall win back his ancestors' renown.
He grows harder day by day, runs wild,
Drinks God's own air, breathes courage with the
storms :

Free from a court's corruption, women's lures—
Until the day when fatherhood shall see
Sonship mature. 'Twill not be long, I swear,
Before the blossom bursts. Then shall he add a
tool.

As sharp and bright as he, to carve our plan.
No common mate for him !

What news bring you
Of that young bride we nurse to match his blood?
What secret messages? These twain shall bring
Each other joy, and heirs to my old age.
(Enter Laurence Bruce, his son).

BRUCE (*continues*)—

Laurence, my boy, here is your kinsman, James, James Stuart. Long ago you met, and now Are almost strangers.

Take him, boy, and show
The chambers ready-garnished for his stay,
And make him doubly welcome—for my sake,
And for your own—your fate is linked with his
In ways unknown as yet.

LAURENCE—

Father, your wish
Is a command ; my greetings, Cousin James :
And if our hospitality should lack
In Scottish homeliness, attribute the defect
To our ill-luck, that on this barren isle
We must receive you. You shall never find
Our hearts less honest, words more insincere,
Our loyalty beclouded for the chance
That sent us here.

(He waves to his father in turning away).

Yet there is much to show
That will delight you here ; the waves ; the rocks
Covered with sea-birds as a tower with snow ;
The many-coloured caves, the rosy lights
Which make the sky a rainbow. And the men

Are strong, as strong as giants, and as fierce :
 And if you wish to fight, a single word
 Will raise a pretty quarrel.

STUART—

Do you fight
 And wrangle with them ?

LAURENCE—

Now and then perhaps
 When first I came, some lad amongst the crowd
 That throngs the harbours when the fishing fleet
 Brings all its booty home, would call me names—
 “ Foreigner,” “ Robber’s spawn,” or “ Scottish tod ”
 Or twit me with the darkness of my hair,
 My southern name.

STUART—

And did you hold your own ?

LAURENCE—

I fought till knuckles bled, and all went black
 In earth and sky !

And oh ! there’s one I hate—
 He never ceases to insult and mock—
 Olaf of Pettista ; we’re foes till death !

STUART—

What has he done to you ?

LAURENCE—

Here is your room !
 And I will leave you to prepare yourself
 For supper. In the armoured hall we sup
 Through which we passed just now.

(He turns to go).

STUART—

No, stay !
 And while I cast aside this travelling-coat,
 And rid me of these voyage-stains, relate
 Your mock heroic contest with the youth
 Of Viking ancestry.

LAURENCE—

He ever swears
 His blood as good as mine—a udaller

His father ! Still he stands taller than I,
 Our age the same : fair and curly-haired,
 A very god amongst the mongrel crew
 That fills the streets of Balta in the spring.
 His rude conceit disgusts me—and the girls
 Side with him, one and all !

STUART—

So there are girls
 That figure in these quarrels ?

LAURENCE—

Well, I must say
 That if the men are fierce and barbarous
 The girls of Unst are pretty. Fresh and bright
 And full of frank good humour. I have seen
 One lovely as an angel . . . 'twas of her
 I asked proud Olaf, but he would not tell
 Her name or dwelling, and dismissed my words
 With such contempt I could have killed him !
 But I shall find her out, for . . .

STUART—

Tush, my boy !
 Spend not your vigour on an aim so low—
 A peasant girl, the child of fisher-folk,
 And none too good perhaps . . .
(Laurence moves restlessly)
 Nay, listen now !

You have a brighter destiny, must grow
 Wings like the eagle's, keep an eye as keen
 As that strong monarch of the sunny spheres !
 Look up, not down ! A fortune in your grasp
 Is worth a dozen pretty faces, eh ?

LAURENCE—

My fortune is my will, and what it wins !
 If wealth buy all but what I want, that wealth
 Is dross to me !

STUART—

What sound is that ?
 The call
 To supper ! Are you ready ? Follow me.
*(Supper over, the elder Bruce and his kinsman talk far
 into the night).*

BRUCE—

Now, tell me, ere we seek the gift of night,
 Before it vanish with the dawn, how fares
 That high-born lass whose springing stem shall bear
 Flowers to her parents' joy and fruit to mine ?
 Does all her being shape to gracefulness ?
 Her limbs to supple strength, her mind to wit ?
 Her gait and manner all to queenliness ?
 And have you subtly trained her climbing growth
 To lean the way I purpose ?

Does she ask
 For news of Laurence ? Does her maiden cheek,
 Like the anemone, tinge to a blush
 At spoken hints of marriage ?

What think you
 Of my dear Laurence ? Is he, in your eye,
 Ripe for the consummation of my dream ?

STUART (*after a long pause*)—

The girl is all your soul can well desire :
 Perfection to a fault : an August peach,
 Just trembling to the hand.

But Bruce, my friend,
 Have you attended with an equal care
 To that young sapling in your arbory ?
 "With twice his father's fire," you said ;

and troth !
 You spoke aright : ten times his father's will !

I hinted at a fortune, and he flashed

"My fortune is my will and what it wins !"

I beg you search, and test his secret hopes :

For it may prove that, with your head upst

In pride of birth, in pride of strength and will,

In that worst form of pride—pride of defeat—

With your imagination rapt in dreams,

The thief of hearts may have already stolen

The orchard fruit, ere yet you deemed it ripe.

(*Bruce starts in his chair with an oath*).

Be calm ; I do not say the case is so :

I beg you watch, and if need be, quick prune

Luxuriant shoots ; else it may be too late

To train the branches to your boasted will.

Your hand, my friend : The warning, given in time,

May lack of relish, but may save your house.

(*He goes out, and Bruce sinks back, deep in thought.*)

SCENE IV

Woodwick.

Morning Ejnar, calling at the window.

EJNAR—

Helga! Awake! Helga, the sun is up!
Up, Helga, lie-a-bed! Helga, arise,
Or must I come and pull you out by force?
The sun has shone these two hours: and 'tis time
We broke our fast. Father has gone to ask
Erland of Snarravoe to watch our home
While we enjoy ourselves in Balta.

Hark! I hear
His footsteps: he will want to eat, and so do I.
Wake, sleepy-eyes!

HELGA (*rubbing her eyes*)—

“Admit him to your dreams
Admit him” Someone knocks
Love, is it you?
O Ejnar! What a noise you make! You robbed
Me of a splendid dream. I thought you came,
Dressed as a Prince of royal blood, to beg
My hand in marriage. I was opening
To let him in, and then 'twas only you!
My foolish brother! noisy, up too soon. . . .

EJNAR—

Too soon! I tell you, Father stands without—

ERICSSON—

Helga! Is Helga up? We must away
If we would see the sights of Baltasound.
And where is breakfast?

HELGA—

'Twill be ready soon
If Ejnar will but give me peace! See, boy,
I must put on my best to-day; my hair
Must have more strands than usual to the plait,
Or you will be the first to call me names!

There : you may come and help me with the fire . .
 Yes . . . the big cauldron. . . What a glorious
 day
 For walking on the hills ! The world is good,
 And all is kind to-day. Away with dreams !
 There's not a fancy of the waking hour
 Can bear the test of Life's reality.

EJNAR—

Would you not rather I had been a prince
 In costly dress ? Would you not rather have
 A stranger bringing admiration's gifts
 Than just a brother of whose love you tire—
 Whose nonsense worries you—whose help is . . .

HELGA—

Oh, there you go, harping upon the string,
 The one same string that Father twanged last night !
 Who spoke of strangers first ? Did I ? Who spoke
 Of being dull, of wanting company ?
 Who dares to think me such a fickle-heart
 As to desert a father who has been my pet
 And life-long darling ? Who but a silly boy
 In groundless jealousy, or mad to tease,
 Could say I had grown tired of him ?

Go, go,
 And wash your dirty face and hands : and if,
 Teasing or serious, you shall ever say
 That I am false to you, or spurn your love,
 You may most righteously disown me !

Go !

(They start upon their walk across the hills.)

ERICSSON—

Come now, my children. Throw your cares away
 As I have done, and drink the wine of spring !
 Can two fresh-blooded creatures such as you
 Know aught of care ? I was young once. E'en now
 My heart is as a boy's, when skies are blue,
 And suns do more than creep around the hills,
 Born for an hour or two to die, like sickly babes.

EJNAR—

I am a child no longer, Father dear !
 Life opens out before me, and I long

Sometimes to tell you of my wider dreams.
 How I should like a boat—my own, I mean—
 Three times as big as that in which we pull
 Just to and from the Holms! I want to roam
 Over the waves till Shetland's hills look small
 And cloudlike in the distance; further still,
 To other lands where I may make new friends,
 And gain a name for fearlessness and skill.
 Here I have beaten nearly all the lads
 In scrambling through the caves, or climbing up
 Paths that my playmates called impossible:
 Or dropping with a rope around my waist,
 Like spider on its thread, from the cliff's edge
 To take the gannet's eggs, or catch the scarfs
 Ere they had learnt to fly.

Father, I beg,

If you should meet to-day with that young man
 Who was so kindly yestereve, you give
 My name to him, and tell him of my wish
 To go to sea. He might perhaps agree
 To take me for a voyage: for I think
 You held him trustworthy. Is it not so?

ERICSSON (*glancing at Helga*)—

As straight and honest as his vessel's mast!
 Yes, I would trust him with the thing I hold
 Most dear and valued.

But, my boy, what rash
 And sudden fantasy has dazzled you?
 Is home so little of a word to you
 That you must try and drown it? Think again
 Before you fling yourself to unknown ends.

EJNAR—

'Tis nothing sudden, Father; but a flooding swell
 That all night long has rolled before the wind
 And now has reached the shore—has caught the
 boat

I called my life, and carried it breast-high
 To leave it where it never lay before.
 I pray you, let me try my growing wings!

ERICSSON—

What say you, Helga? Is your Ejnar
 To battle with the world, the winds and waves?
 And can we part with him?

HELGA—

My heart says, No ;
And yet my judgment feels that you should test
His worth, dear father.

Pray, who is the man
Of whom he speaks ? Sent, maybe, just in time
To make a pathway for his glowing wish.
(*Ejnar slips to her and squeezes her hand.*)

ERICSSON (*aside*)—

A path to mine !
(*aloud*) Little one, you shall see
Him presently and judge him for yourself.

HELGA—

How dear this peat and heather are to me !
How hard to leave them ! I suppose a man
Thinks less of what is near and close to him.
And more of what is far, out of his reach,
Perhaps entirely unattainable.
Does a time come when every sleepy soul
Wakes up—as does the sleepy earth in spring
When violets kiss its cheek—when each dim eye
Gets longer vision—sees things in a light
New and unspeakably bewildering ?
Has your soul woken, Ejnar ? Has your sight
Pierced the low veil of purple haze that hangs
Before my vision still ?

EJNAR—

I cannot tell
Exactly what has come about. I know
I am a man, and want man's work to do,
Man's risk to dare, and man's rewards to gain !

ERICSSON (*to himself*)—

It is myself new-born ! Not long ago
I uttered just such burning words as these !
(*aloud*)
Ah, children, you must leave the nest, I know ;
I cannot keep you. Only give me time
To find a future for you, ere you go,
And line and feather it !

Boy, I will ask
A thousand questions ere you bind yourself

To one of these rough foreigners : I'll make
A thousand stipulations !

And, my girl,
My baby Helga, when your eyelids ope
I shall take care they meet a pleasant view ;
Shall plot and plan unceasingly to make
Your future happy.

Here we are at last !

HELGA—

Oh, see the crowds ! Look at the coloured sails !
The variegated boats, and motley clothes !
And there is Cousin Olaf !

MANY VOICES—

Eric !

Ejnar, too !

And Helga !

Ericsson, you have a pair
Of fine young birds there !

Aye, I know it, friend !

Helga of Woodwick, welcome to the fair !
Come with us, Helga !

No, with us, we beg !

HELGA—

I cannot follow all, and different ways !
Here, Cousin Olaf, just as once before
You were my guide (until you lost me, eh ?),
So take me round to-day.

OLAF—

Most willingly :

Where will you go ?

HELGA—

Everywhere, Olaf, please !

I must see everyone, and everything ;
Look at the trinkets, finger all the stuffs,
Look at the swords you love, with jewelled hilts,
And taste the sweetmeats !

OLAF—

Well then, to begin !

HELGA—

See, there is Gerda ! Anlaf, her brother, too !
 Anlaf of Norwick : let us turn aside,
 I do not like them : shall I tell you why ?
 They always bring a cloud across the sun—
 They grumble ever—pass on spiteful tales
 Of all our friends : such useless bickering
 Is hateful to me !

Olaf, would you like
 A present for yourself ? Well, as we go,
 Look round and choose ; and if you keep me safe
 This time, I will reward you with your choice.
*Laurence Bruce, stepping back suddenly from a stall,
 knocks violently against them.)*

HELGA—

Oh, how rough . . . !

(To Laurence) I beg your pardon, Sir.

LAURENCE—

A thousand times—your lady's pardon, too,
 An she will grant it !

OLAF—

Sir. . . .
*(Helga looks up and meets Laurence's eyes : they both
 stand spellbound.)*

. . . . We are not used
 To being trodden on, even by Scotland's best !
 You should apologise with better grace ;
 I fancied you were noble.

HELGA *(sweetly)*—

Olaf, hush !
 This gentleman has all that he would ask—
 My pardon for his inadvertent move :
 We are not hurt, Sir : Olaf is too strong
 To feel a touch, and I was on his arm,
 And so had good support

I thank you, Sir !
(Olaf, scowling, turns away to look at the stall)

LAURENCE *(quickly, and under his breath)*—

You are my angel ! I have sought you long !
 Your name, I pray, I beg you ! Your face
 Has lived deep in my heart since Balta fair
 Three summers since !

HELGA—

And I remember you !
 You found me once weeping amongst the crowd.
 Helga my name : Helga of Woodwick !

LAURENCE (*in a low tone*)—

A sweet name, Helga.

(*aloud*) Helga, not a day
 Shall pass e'er we have met again !
 (*He turns, and sees Stuart watching him*)
 Good-bye !

HELGA (*wonderingly*)—

Good-bye, Sir !

OLAF—

Curse the man ! Curse him, I say !
 Why does he linger there ? How could you talk
 To that proud alien Scot !

HELGA—

I did not know,
 And know not even now, his name or birth !
 Who is he, Olaf ?

OLAF—

Do not know that fox ?
 Why, he of Muness Castle—Laurence Bruce !
 I hate him bitterly ; I trow he loves not me !
 We will not speak of him !

HELGA—

No, cousin dear !
 I'm sorry that I vexed you. Come and choose
 A leathern jerkin for yourself, or belt tricked out
 With jewels, or a sharp two-bladed knife :
 To-night it shall be yours !

(*They pass on.*)

(*Later in the day. Ericsson, deep in conversation with Boras.*)

ERICSSON—

I would you knew my son as well, my friend,
 As I, his father : supple, strong and keen ;
 Brimful of daring ; he is mad to rush
 Unarmed on life, and seize it by the throat,
 And squeeze its essence out.

Boras, if you
Were ever needing, say, a trusty hand,
Good at the oar, and skilful with a sail,
There were one ready-made !

He burns to go
To places whence you come—to compass this
Would work like any bond-slave !

BORAS—

In very sooth
You must be proud to know the youth your son.
We will consider your proposal : we—
For Falster there, my mate, shares in my toil,
Shares my ill-fortune and success alike,
And by his solid wisdom oft I stand
Where else I should have fallen. Still, at first sight,
There's something in the plan.

Good Ericsson !

(He rises suddenly and grips Ericsson by the arm.)
For now that you have been so frank with me
I will be frank with you !

Last night I heard
You sing your daughter's praises : and this morn
Watching amidst the folk I saw you pass
Along the shore : and on your left there strode
Your lusty boy : and on the right, good friend,
And clinging to your arm, as fair of face
As any goddess of Valhalla, her
To whom my life's tides strongly set and flowed
At the first mention of her name.

If now
You deem me not unworthy, I would crave
Permission to besiege her—silently
At first, and as one nears a copse
Flooded with throbbing music, lest one step
Scare the sweet singer into quietude.
And oh ! I will be honourable, true,
Staunch to the core ; and when the moment comes
To speak of love, I'll take the Yea or Nay
Of her heart's will, and storm the heavens with a
song

If Yea : if Nay, will wander home to die !

ERICSSON (*deeply moved*)—

Good Captain, Captain Boras, you must know
That all my heart is with you ; that the day
Draws near when Helga must be wed.
For such a bride no graceless, ill-bred churl !
For daintiness so fine, no wooing rough :
For though I am her father, I dare claim
Her fit to marry one of noble blood ;
Is not her own blood noble ?

Boras, then,
My hand ! Go prosper : woo the maid, and win !
(*They reach the house where Ejnar and Helga have met.
The hostess, Vaila, greets them.*)

VAILA—

Come in, come in ; right welcome are you both !
The children are within. Lord ! Ericsson,
What limbs young Ejnar has ! And what a face
And head of hair your Helga owns. When last
I saw that maiden, she was thin and straight
As any hurdle-pin ! But now . . . ! Well, man,
Ye'll have to say good-bye at church's door
Before next winter's peat is stacked . . . at least
If you give Balta folk another chance
Of worshipping her beauty !

BORAS (*tapping his foot impatiently*)—

Shall we not
Enter, as the good wife bids ?

ERICSSON (*smiling*)—

Aye, we will !
My son, here is last evening's friend :
Helga, here's Captain Boras, from a land
That's not so far from our ancestral home.
Now bid him welcome : then we'll drink his health—
Wish him success, a safe return : perhaps,
If his heart wishes it, a future wife !

HELGA—

Good evening, Sir ! I trust you like our town,
And find the people kindly.

EJNAR—

Welcome, Sir !

And when you've stayed the hearty appetite
 All sailors have, tell us some stirring tales
 Of sea adventure !

BORAS—

Then you love the sea ?

*(turning to Helga, who is looking out of the window,
 and starts with an effort to recall herself.)*

Happy am I to meet you : I have heard enough
 About your goodness in the little home
 At Woodwick, to assure myself of this—
 That you will not despise a seaman, rough
 But not unkind, and sworn to loyalty
 To any relative or friend of Ericsson.

HELGA *(absently)*—

I thank you, Sir. No friend of his will lack
 The little courtesy that Woodwick boasts.
 Be seated ! While you charm the itching ears
 Of Ejnar with your tales, I'll go and help
 Old Vaila with the supper.

*(Later in the evening. Farewells have been said ;
 Helga and Ejnar have started homewards. Ericsson
 lingers to chat with Boras.)*

ERICSSON—

You made a great impression on my boy :
 And on my Helga, if I judge aright.
 I never saw the child so quiet !

BORAS *(sadly)*—

Sir,

Her eyes are pools of love, but not for me :
 Her lips drop jewels as the moon drops dew,
 But I shall never kiss them, Ericsson !
 Your little bird has flown ; her heart is won :
 Herself aware or not, I feel it is
 Irrevocably given !

I thank you, Sir ;

I do not say I shall not try again : Farewell !
(He goes away downcast, repeating—)

Her eyes are pools of love, but not for me !
(Ericsson turns homewards with a puzzled brow).

SCENE V

HELGA (*walking alone on the cliffs : she talks aloud to herself with occasional snatches of song.*)

Blow, sweet wind, from the endless sea :

And shine, dear sun, above :

Take me your daughter fair to be

And wrap me round with love !

Birds, birds ! and I know not which I like
Best of the screaming multitude ! What now,
Old gull, old swooping, whirling, screeching gull ?
Why all this rage ?

Ah, yes, I have it now !

Here, at my very feet, your baby lies,
A fluffy scorie. I must pick you up
And kiss your downy head ! Peace, mother dear !
I only kiss your babe.

Oh, little wretch !

Why peck so viciously at one you love ?
They are not wholly lovable, these gulls !
Look at yon Scooty Allen ! He would snatch
The hard-earned mouthful from that kittiwake :
Can only get it, though, by brutal force :
And yet he gets it ! Fulmar petrels, now,
Are kindlier : 'tis fun to watch them teach
Their babies how to fly. What hours it takes,
And what cajoling, to entice the mites
From the safe perch upon the jutting rock !
But see the greedy shag ! That wriggling trout
Can never pass his jaws, it is too big !
No ! he has gulped it down !

Be quiet, gulls,

And let me listen for the happy voice
Of that gay lark who puts you all to shame.
He's like a poet, singing lovely songs
When no one listens, and his tale is drowned
By the fierce storm of gossip far below.
But oh ! this breeze is grand ! It makes me long . . .

(*She sings again*)

O wind, I wonder what gifts you bring
From countries far away :
Do you know, swift tern with the crescent wing,
Have you heard the breezes say ?

LAURENCE BRUCE (*approaching from the opposite direction*)—

I cannot blot her likeness from my mind :
She lives before, within me ! Oh, what fate
Can lead me to her presence once again !
I'll wander lone, an outcast on the hills,
And taste but air—the feeding air of hope—
Until I meet her, win her.

Can a face
Really exist so beautiful ? Or have I dreamed,
And shall I dream again ? See what is not ?
By some delusion of an ill-wrought brain
Count evil good, and fancy black is white ?
No, I have seen—(if but one moment's glance
Is all I have to guide me)—features pure
And true as any artist coaxed from stone.
That purity, that truth, lay not outspread
Upon a surface merely : it surged deep,
And emanated from a being shaped
By God's right hand before He thought of Sin !
And on her rounded cheek, sun-touched to rose,
And in her blue-grey eyes with lashes soft
Up-curved upon their margin : on her mouth,
Sweet, mobile ; on her small and dimpling chin :
Aye, and upon her body, supple, lithe,
And rioting with health, the same truth lives !
It is God's truth I love her !

HELGA (*drawing nearer, sings—*)

How can you paint the world so bright,
O Sun, without a brush ?
And streak the sea with mauve-green light.
Or kiss it to a blush ?

Ah, yes, the sea ! How could a maiden live
Without the sea to talk to ! How could I

Pass the long day unless it spoke to me ?
It speaks to me in colour, as the birds
Chatter in music.

It is my magic pond
In which I throw my mood, and bring it out
Dripping with pearls, or salt with fancy's tears.
It is my mirror, where I see myself—
Sometimes strong, strong and vehement,
A Queen in anger : sometimes lazy, dull,
Reflecting only other people's thoughts.
Yet—No ! Not anybody's thoughts ! The sun's
To whom as lord of life, my being turns,
In whose dear smile I live !

(She reaches the point, and stands at the edge of the cliff.)

LAURENCE BRUCE *(still talking to himself)*—

Yes, I marked well her forehead, white and broad :
Enarching eyebrows, faultless as the bow
Which sets its verdict on a passing storm :
Her crown of hair : such hair was never seen
Even in bonnie Scotland, where a lass
Need fear no rival had she half that fall
Of mingled red, gold, brown—her heritage
From centuries of fiery viking blood.

(He catches sight of Helga's figure.)

Who then is here ? A spirit of the sea ?

(He sees the wind-blown hair.)

Has every woman on this fortunate isle
Hair of my Helga's colour ?

(quickenning his pace.)

Oh, great God !

It is the maid herself ! O heart ! O Fate !
Do I ask where she dwells ? Do I commit
Rash sacrilege ? She has no dwelling low,
Low down amongst the sons of godless men !
She lives upon the hills—the heath—the cliff :
The gulls are her attendant angels !

Hark !

The wind is bearing down her voice to me !

(He springs forward, and stands close beside her.)



“Dear Sun, O kiss me too !”

HELGA (*turning slowly round with outspread arms, sings*)—

Blow, sweet wind, from the boundless sea !

Dear Sun, O kiss me, too !

I know that your heart is in love with me,
And I am in love with you !

(*She finds herself face to face with Laurence, who also stands with his arms outstretched towards her : their hands meet : he takes her fingers in his own, and they stand at arms' length, gazing into each other's eyes.*)

LAURENCE (*speaks first*)—

Sing that again ! No, say it in the voice
That I heard yesterday. I love your voice.

HELGA (*dreamily, and with her eyes still fixed on his*)—

Dear Sun, O kiss me, too !

I know that your heart is in love with me,
And I am in love with you !

LAURENCE—

When did you know it, Helga, Love of mine !
Long, long ago I knew it : years ago !
To-day we are not strangers : we have lived
Deep in each other's hidden lives : so deep
That details of this intimacy sweet
As yet are out of sight ! Only the fact—
The glowing truth—of love has leaped to own
Love's presence—has outstripped the rest,
And only years and years of happy talk can find
Those details out.

Helga, my own, again !

Say it again, and I will say it too !

(*Both*)

I know that your heart is in love with me,
And I am in love with you !

(*Slowly their faces draw together, and with hands still clasped they take their first kiss.*)

(*Two hours later the dropping sun warns Helga of the time.*)

HELGA—

The sun is sinking. I must go in haste
And make my father's supper !

LAURENCE—

When shall we meet again ? Tell me, Love,

HELGA—

 Dear, I am yours !
And when you call, a voice shall answer you.

*(They appoint a trysting-place. Laurence watches
Helga's form till it disappears : then he turns
away singing—)*

Rejoice, ye everlasting hills !
Sing, ripples of the sparkling sea !
And laugh, O Sun, in the heavens above,
For Helga smiles on me !

SCENE VI

(*Above Pettista.*)

JAMES STUART (*striding over the heath, deep in meditation*)

This is most difficult, most unforeseen !

Who would have thought that Bruce could be so
blind

As to permit the quarry to escape

Whilst planning to entrap it ! Who could tell

That he would let his very son destroy

His cherished dream.

And yet it will be so

If I can find no antidote to pour

Into that youthful heart, and so dilute

And disannul the potency of love.

For little doubt there is that he has fallen

Deep into boyhood's sweet insanity—

A first attachment. Calf-love, you may say—

But I know something of the bull-calf : yes,

Have seen his heifer, too—as fair a maid

As one could hope to find in this poor isle

Where men and women live on, God knows what !

And crouch all through their bitter winter's night

Over a choking peat.

The girl is fair—

Too beautiful for me to dare despise :

I must achieve at once some master-stroke,

Get her thoughts turned elsewhere, or bribe her
house

To send her on her travels : or provide

Another lover.

Ah, that is the best !

A host of striplings such a wench must have

Ready to bow the knee, to worship her,

To sell their fortunes, such as they may be,

For right to call her theirs.

Stay, let me think !

I can recall a face—a name. Oh, yes !

The fellow Laurence hates—his one-time foe

In the great sport of fisticuffs.

That day
In Balta ; how they scowled and glared ! The girl
Was hanging on his arm. I shrewdly guess
She has a soft place in her heart for him,
And he is more than fain to wed her.

(He turns a corner in the path, and sees a woman's figure. She sits on the spongy moss, with face buried between her hands.)

Ah !

I'll ask this maid the way ! A comely lass !
My girl, canst tell me where Pettista lies ?
Rumour directed me along this path ;
But where to find, and how to know when found,
Is more than task enough !

GERDA *(of Norwick, neither rising nor taking her hands from her face)*—

'Tis just below—

Follow the path along those low-pitched rocks
And you will soon be there.

STUART—

Come now, my lass,

That's but a chilly greeting for a Shetland maid
To give a wandering stranger !

(Gerda looks up indignantly, disclosing a tear-stained face.)

STUART—

What ! In tears ?

(He sits down beside her.)

What is the pain that furrows up that brow,
And fills the sky with storm-clouds ? Is it pain
Of body, or the sharper pain of mind ?
Is it the old, old story of the heart ?
Affection scorned, or lack of any love ?

GERDA *(distrustfully)*—

You are a foreigner, maybe a Scot :
Why are you prying into other people's hearts ?
What is your purpose ?

STUART (*suddenly attracted by the girl's manner and thoughtful speech*)—

I will be frank with you,
For I have troubles, too : perhaps the tale
Of mine will help the carrying of yours.
A udaller of Woodwick. . . . Ericsson. . . .
Perhaps you know him ?

GERDA—

Yes, I know him well.

STUART—

His daughter, Helga, now—a radiant lass
Just on the threshold of life's summer-love,
You know her, too ?

GERDA (*still sullenly*)—

Aye, well !

STUART—

She has, I think,
Some flutterings of the heart : I think the girl
Would not be sorry for a helping hand,
A word in season to the bashful youth
Who loves, and knows not.

GERDA (*sadly*)—

Pray, Sir, what could I
Who cannot manage my own love affairs
Do for another ! And that other

STUART (*breaking in*)—

Do !

. You can do much for me, my bonnie girl !

GERDA (*showing more interest*)—

Is your heart troubled then ? Alas, I fear
Each heart must carry its own bitterness !
My sorrow mine ; your trouble so remote
From my poor world that I should scarcely know
The words you told it in.

STUART (*debating inwardly how much to reveal in order to enlist her help in pushing on matters between Olaf and Helga.*)

Listen awhile

—Your name I know not—

GERDA—

Gerda is my name.

Gerda of Norwick.

STUART—

Listen, then, Gerda.

But, first a question. When I asked just now
Where lay Pettista, you could answer me.

Know you the udaller there, Olaf by name ?

And is he not inflamed with inward love

For ~~that~~ same Helga ?

GERDA—

Sir, I beg you speak

Less of this matter. In my mind it lies

As cold and heavy as a gravestone :

STUART—

What !

GERDA—

Oh ! I must tell you, I must have it out—

A stranger's better than a kinsman here—

'Tis Olaf that I love. He loves me not,

And tells me so by eye and lip and life !

Yet once he thought me good enough—I blush,

But I must say it—good enough to hold

Close to his breast, and call me sweet and fair.

(She stops, biting her lips to keep back the tears.)

STUART—

And what has wrought the mischief, little one ?

GERDA *(sobbing)*—

It is—I had not told you, but you're kind—

And oh, I am so wretched ! Olaf seems

To be at Helga's beck and call ! But she—

She is a child, scarce-formed ! His fancy roves

To each new-coming vision ; all my troth

And gifts to him are wasted. On the day

Of Balta Fair, when he had promised me

A necklace and a gown, he passed me by,

Following Helga like a will-less sheep.

And oh, my heart is sore ; and oh, my pride

Has risen against him.

I could work her ill—
 Could spite, could sting, could crush her, that she
 dares
 To steal my Olaf !

STUART (*amazed at her outburst, listens closely, reconsidering his plans*)—

Gerda, dry those eyes—
 They are too bright to quench with jealous tears !
 Said I not you could help me ? I will show
 A way by which you shall regain your love,
 Your fickle Olaf !

Can I trust you now ?
 Keen wit is needed would we compass this.

GERDA (*impulsively*)—

Oh, I shall be so glad, so happy, Sir !
 If all becomes as fair and smooth again
 As but a month ago. . . .

(*She pulls herself up short and looks hard at Stuart.*)

Sir, who are you ?
 I doubt if I should give my happiness,
 And such great power into a stranger's hands !
 I long to trust you, for you speak me fair :
 I do not think you would deceive.

Good Sir,
 Let me know all : and I will frankly say
 If all my heart goes with this plan of yours.

STUART (*now feeling sure of his ground*)—

You said aright, fair Gerda, when you guessed
 I had some purpose : I have work to do—
 Or, if you like, a careful game to play,
 That reaches deep into the future life,
 The interests, the honour, of a friend.
 Learn then how you may prove the seeming love
 That Helga bears to Olaf wholly false.
 To-night, at dusk, were you to wander forth
 Upon the jutting headland that protrudes
 To part the northern and the western waves,
 Helga will meet a man : will call him love :
 Will sink upon his breast, and lying there
 Will give him all he asks at her fond lips.

You start—grow pale : but, as my life is God's,
That lover is not Olaf !

Did you see
This happy pair embrace before your eyes,
Then might you with trustworthy evidence
Back to your chilly lover, and might win
A glowing victory !

Yet, I beg you mark
What I must claim as payment for this boon.
For he, who steals at evening from the hearth
To kiss the fair, is near and dear to me.
Within my keeping his bright honour lies ;
His honour plighted by ancestral bonds :
His love and loyalty not separate
But close conjoined : and on the dusky cliff
He stains his honour, desecrates his hearth,
And strains to snapping pitch the ties which call
Him to another bride !

Gerda, thus far

You understand me ?

GERDA (*in a puzzled tone*)—

Sir, I follow you,
As far as facts may go : but when you speak
Of pledges, troth, and honour, I am lost
In a vast sea of ignorance !

What help
Can all this bring to me ? Will it not loose
A flood of strife and anger—all the waves
Of wolfish passions, jealousy and hate
Ten times more deep than sorrow's flood before ?

STUART—

No, not if you are wary, child, and take
Me for your confidant, and none beside.
For on the one hand I would guard my friend
Against onrushing infidelity
To one predestinate his life to share :
And on the other hand, I would redeem
My promises of aid to you—remove
The lovely Helga from the tilting-ring
Of rival beauties—thus re-pave the way
That leads to Olaf's heart.

But not a word,
 Sweet Gerda, of my hand with you in this !
 And—still more necessary to our plan—
 Try not the unknown lover's face to see,
 His name to know. Let Olaf find that out,
 If he is able by his natural wit.
 You saw the form alone—you heard the kiss,
 The sighs and vows !

You understand me now ?

GERDA—

But do you really think that Eric's child
 Has only used my Olaf as a blind !

Great heavens,
 What foolish infants men can be—what need
 They have of true and loving wives, to guide
 Their wandering baby-feet to wisdom's ways !
 Oh ! but I will be even with this

(She checks herself.)

Kind Sir, control me ! Give me caution's key
 To lock my passions as within a cell,
 And I their gaoler !

When the time is ripe
 I hint of this to Ericsson ? And bid
 Him send her on a voyage—take her far
 To Lerwick, or to Kirkwall ?

Is that so ?

STUART *(nodding)*—

Stand firm my friend ; and hang upon my signs :
 So shall we woo, and win, our hearts' desires.
 Helga must lose both lovers at a stroke,
 Without delay, or my fond youth his fame,
 And you your idol's heart for ever !

Girl,

Are you strong, staunch ?

I see you are !

Your hand :

Were you a man, you would not suit my mood,
 My fixed intent, as, womanly, you do.
 There, you have gained my admiration, maid !
 It is not lightly won.

Farewell !

(To Gerda) Farewell,

GERDA—

And God be with you !

(With a bright smile she waves him out of sight.)

STUART *(breathing deep, mutters to himself)*—

All is fair, they say,

In love and war ; and here we deal in both.

SCENE VII

The trysting-place—Colliasta Geo.

*Helga asleep in a boat a little way from shore. Laurence
Bruce approaches from the cliff above and watches
her.*

LAURENCE—

“ My fortune is my will, and what it wins ! ”
Who said that ? Was it I ?

Alas, my will
Is as a blade of grass upon the shore,
Bent as the sea-wind lists ; and ever bent
In one direction ! Did I boast a crown,
Were I indeed the monarch of a realm,
That crown I'd take, and cast before the feet
Of her who sways me—yield my fortune up
A gift, and but a tawdry gift at that,
To her whom nature shaped to be a queen.
O sweet and gracious maiden ! O the wealth
That lies enmeshed in her unbraided hair !
O white, white shoulder peeping from the vest
By slumber disarrayed ! And see, the tide
Slow, slow, and lazily her chariot swings,
And bears her on to me !

*(The boat grazes a skerry. Helga springs up and looks
around her.)*

HELGA—

Oh, it is lovely, this dear spot of mine—
My favourite hiding-place ! Long, long ago
I chose it for my realm, and sat as queen
Amid unseen attendants. Courtiers thronged
Around me : yet I sat alone, alone,
Waiting and waiting. Ah, and now I know
What I was waiting for ! It was the Prince,
The lover of my dream ! Dear Father knew !
My clever Father saw the future clear !
And when I tell him that the knock has come

And Love has entered, how he will rejoice !
 Oh, is he real ? Is he not a wraith,
 A fancy of the brain ? Suppose to-day
 I sit and sit, and he comes not : suppose
 Love has forgotten me ! But oh, if that
 Should be my cruel lot, what's left in life
 That's true or beautiful ?

I hardly dare
 Look at my palace, lest its sunny walls
 Prove bare and dark and cold. Yet if I turn
 And see him there, my Prince, my heart will leap
 And What was that ?

LAURENCE—

Helga, my lovely one,
 Here am I waiting—so impatiently !
 Unless you come to me I fain would plunge
 Into the little bay, and swim across
 And take you prisoner of war. Ah, then,
 I would not free you till you paid in full
 Love's heavy ransom !

HELGA (*landing with a beating heart*)—

See, I come, I come :
 Laurence, I come, for all my fears have passed !

LAURENCE—

What fears, dear maid ?

HELGA—

The fear that I had dreamed
 You and your love for me to fancied life !

LAURENCE—

I too have known these precious fears, my love !
 And all across the moor the wind has cried
 "Speed, speed thy steps, lest spirits bear her far
 Into the dim enchanted land of Never-was !"
 All night, all day, my heart has been on fire
 With molten song : the burden of its theme
 Just Helga, Helga !

Far across the sky
 I saw grey clouds come looming from the south,
 Boding your absence ! But, my Helga, see !

In your sweet presence naught but light can live :
 The sun has overpowered those sullen fates,
 And here we stand together ! Dearest, take
 This tiny gift, and wear for love of me !

HELGA—

Oh, 'tis white heather ! Naught but joy can dawn
 For her who from a lover takes its bloom :
 There, place it for me !

LAURENCE—

White the heather lies
 Above a breast that's white as foaming seas !

HELGA—

O climb with me, until we reach the height
 Of life and love, and look upon a sea
 That knows no bounds.

LAURENCE—

So ! Leaning on my arm
 Climb on till heaven is won.

HELGA—

O Vallaveld,
 You gave me birth, you watched my childhood grow
 And now you give me love !

LAURENCE—

Rest here awhile,
 And, buried deep in heather, let your thoughts
 Sweep back to far-gone days : give me the joy
 Of hearing of your childhood.

HELGA—

Yes, I will,
 If you will then repay me in this coin
 And tell me yours.

LAURENCE—

Agreed ! Begin.

HELGA (*after a pause*)—

How small,
 And tame and petty all life looks beside
 The giant fact of you ! I hardly lived ;

I only ate and drank, and slept and grew.
 My soul knew nothing : in a cloudy veil
 Of purple haze it lay—until . . . until . . .
 O Laurence !

LAURENCE—

Listen ! As a boy I strove
 To pierce a shadowy future : but no power
 On earth could penetrate its gloom : and oft
 My spirit almost fainted for desire
 Of . . . Yes, of what to-day I know was you !

HELGA—

Is not my fairy palace beautiful !
 This voe in miniature, with waters blue . . .
 Blue . . .

LAURENCE—

As the eyes which love it !

HELGA—

Here I lie
 And watch and listen through a summer's eve :
 Watch the great sun go down upon the sea—
 Watch the soft haze so quickly brightening
 To rainbow glories of a coming day.
 List to the dunter-drake, as lying far
 On the still bosom of the silent sea
 He calls his brood to rest an hour.
 For sleep
 And night are but as passing clouds
 That fleck the sky a moment and are gone !

LAURENCE—

A land of wonders, yours—an isle where dreams
 Have time but to be true !

I love my home
 To south of us as angels love their heaven :
 Yet if the angels fell desiring realms
 That seemed to beggar theirs, so will I fall
 In coveting your happy dwelling-place !

HELGA—

Then, when the pleasant summer hurried by
 And nights grew dark again, my footsteps turned

Hither to watch that wonder of our sky,
 The great Aurora, blotting out the light
 Of moon and stars with dancing, shimmering rays
 And streaks of brilliant crimson, purple-winged,
 And fringed with dainty shades of mauve and green
 From zenith to horizon.

LAURENCE—

Thus, dear heart,
 The colours of your northern soul have shot
 Into my night's clear sky : and thus your love
 Shall gorgeously illuminate my life
 Till darkness is not !

HELGA—

Do you see my boat—
 My sea-bird, Bonxie ? We will sail, one day,
 To see the lovely caves. The colours there
 Will dazzle you no less than midnight's fires.
 Vivid metallic greens, with brilliant blue,
 Bright reds, and bronze : and overlaying all
 Soft opalescent hues—rich harmony !

LAURENCE—

Yes, I will see your caves : but let me say
 I'm dazzled quite already in the cave
 Of your sweet mind, that flashes every tint
 And colour—rich and perfect harmony !

HELGA—

O flatterer ! And I would have you come
 Still further out with me across the waves
 To where the buttressed Holms stand silently.
 There we can gather gulls' eggs. I can pull
 Twice there and back ! I love the Holms ! They
 speak
 To me of life and death : and as I lie
 Watching the distant vessels come and go
 I think of souls that silently repair
 From this world to another.

Laurence, say,
 Does my long chatter tire you ?

I am tired,
 Yes, just a little : I will rest my head

On your strong shoulder. Take me, dearest Prince,
And show to me your kingdom in the south !

LAURENCE—

I am no prince, dear maid ! though I can say
I am of noble blood, and one day fall
To ruling as my trade.

An exile here
My father : banished from a land that shows
Him little gratitude for noble deeds.
He nurses me in wrath, and hopes a day
May come when I shall set his fortunes right :
But how a lad so young can compass this
He never tells me. With my kinsman James
(He is of Stuart stock, and noble too)
He hatches all his plots.

I like not James !
He spies upon me, throws me crafty looks,
And does me ill, I think, behind my back,
I do not speak him fair, as duty bids :
I cannot be the slave of any man,
And he would bend me, twist me to his will !
He fain would stop my choosing—so he hints—
Whom I should marry : keeps no doubt in mind
Some heiress from whose dowry he may filch
Ill-gotten perquisite !

But what have I,
I, Laurence Bruce, to do with other maids,
When I have crowned one queen ! Oh, Helga, you,
You are my queen of destiny : your hand
Alone shall hold my fortunes : and I deem
Your beauty ample dowry ! It is I
Who should owe all in wedding such a bride !
Helga, I woo you not as worldlings woo :
Come not with jewelled caskets, fair without—
Full of cold stones within, the seeds of strife
And jealousy ! My casket is my heart.
I offer you my youth, my love, my soul !

HELGA—

And I do take them, dearest ! In that soul—
That casket—I have seen one gem unpriced,
And that is all I need. It is yourself,
Your true, true self, and all it is to me !

LAURENCE—

Seal that ! Aye, seal it on my lips
 As I upon your hand ; and say with me
 " I love you till the very end of time !
 I love you till Death rise from yonder sea
 And blot out this world's light ! "

HELGA (*folded in his embrace*)—

I love . . . till death !

(*They look up, and find the sun has set. The waves
 moan quietly along the shore. A little shiver
 passes through both.*)

LAURENCE (*holding Helga so that he can gaze deep into
 her eyes, sings :*)

Good-bye,

For now the light is fading
 In a saffron sky :
 The night its dewy burden is unlading,
 And stars leap sudden to their posts on high :
 Good-bye !

Good-bye,

For time has taken pinions
 And the night-birds fly
 Across the sombre heath. The silent minions
 Of mystery and darkness hover nigh :
 Good-bye !

Good-bye :

One moment in the gloaming
 While the far waves sigh :
 Then must we join the sea-birds quickly
 homing—
 Ah, happy they ! But anguished you and I !
 Good-bye !

Good-bye !

Helga, the vow thou hearest,
 And thy low reply,
 Proclaim thee here and now and ever dearest,
 And mistress of yon starry empery !
 Good-bye !

(*They strain to one more kiss, and part.*)

SCENE VIII

The sea off Woodwick.

ERICSSON (*sailing homewards alone from the fishing grounds.*)

What has he seen, that he should readily—
Not to say tamely—lose self-confidence?
What has he seen, that I have never guessed?
“Your little bird has flown.”

How dared the man
Talk such absurdities: presume to know
What I, her father, know not!

This I know,
That Helga never hid herself from me:
Her life, and all its hopes and joys and fears,
Are spread an open book for me to read.
Would she conceal so great a thing as love
Had it yet touched her life?

Spoke she not truth
When at my hints of love that soon must dawn,
As from our winter dawns the ice-gript sun,
She heaped assurance high with maiden scorn?
“To live and die in my dear Woodwick!” Thus,
And thus she spake.

Again, 'twas but a month
Or three weeks since—within this very boat—
She merrily disowned all fancy of the day
When one might come and steal her for a bride,
And leave me desolate.

A lovely night!
It even caught my notice, mostly dulled
And all too bent to look up gratefully
In thanks for what I have.

The other boats
Came with us: but we drifted west, and pulled
Slowly along the tideway's edge (that's where

The best and sweetest piltock find the hook).
 A quiet evening : and the sunset glow
 Lit up the sea, and slowly passed away
 Into the deep, dark, star-lit blue of night.
 And, as the dala mist came spectrally
 From the deep valleys far upon the land,
 I turned to see my Helga sitting still
 As rapt as I, her head upon her hands.
 I softly called. She heard not. Called again,
 And yet once more.

When, with a sudden smile
 Half-caught amid the shades that gathered round,
 She answered sighingly, " I love it all
 So dearly, Father ! "

" Is that all," said I
 (Half jesting half in earnest) " that you love ?
 For you are maiden grown, and sure it is
 I cannot keep you ever to myself,"
 " Why not ? " she cried : " who, pray, could come
 between

Me and my Father, best of all to me ? "
 What meant this Captain Boras ? Not a doubt
 Exists within my mind that he is sane,
 Clear-headed, single-hearted, keen as steel.
 " Irrevocably given ! " He uses words
 Too long and difficult for me to understand.
 Well, he'll come to-night : he will propose
 Himself a formal suitor for her hand :
 And we shall see ! Shall hear some more, perhaps,
 In explanation of his prophecy.
 " Given " indeed ! If so, it has been given
 As no true maid should give it ! A first glance,
 A tone of foolish flattery in a voice
 The way that leads to trouble. I'll beware :
 Sometimes a maid is hurt by innocence !

*(His boat runs ashore : he drags it up the beach, and
 turns homeward in the dusk. Hearing a step :)*

Who is it ? who goes there ?

A VOICE (*unrecognised*)—

I want a word
 With Eric Ericsson. 'Tis he, I think.

ERICSSON—

You guess aright. 'Tis he. Now speak again ;
The waves there drowned your voice.

Where's Helga then ?

And who are you ? And what's your quest, my dear ?

GERDA (*taking his hand*)—

It's Gerda, little Gerda : now grown wise—

Yes, very wise and womanly : for love

Can teach a woman much, and sorrow more !

Where's Helga ! Ericsson, you know !

ERICSSON—

I know

That I am hastening homewards, and shall find

My Helga on the hearth. And presently

Ejnar will come with Captain Boras : he,

The wealthy merchant, honest, frank and true.

And you shall join us. You will ope your eyes

To see the handsome Captain—strain your ears

To hear what he will say !

Gerda, for you

I'll let the secret out ! He comes to-night,

His hand upon his heart : will bow the knee

To Helga and to me : to Helga, as I know,

Because he loves her : and to me, who hold

The power to grant her to his keeping !

GERDA—

What !

You know ! And have you known it long ?

ERICSSON—

Since Balta fair. The man is deep in love

With our fair maid ! But for one single hitch—

A little fly within the honey—all were o'er,

And bells a-ringing.

GERDA—

Tell me, what is that ?

ERICSSON—

Why, as I've told so much, no harm is done

If all goes with it. He is not so sure

That she returns his love.

GERDA (*puzzled*)—

He not so sure ?
 But I can tell you better. They have met
 These many nights upon the star-kissed cliff,
 And vowed, and sighed, and vowed.
 And I have come
 To warn you that her lover is not free—
 Forswears himself, and wrongs her trusting heart!
 He is betrothed already to a maid,
 And in a passing sojourn on our isle
 Does but amuse himself with Helga!

ERICSSON (*sternly*)—

Girl,
 You utter blasphemy!

GERDA—

I swear

ERICSSON—

Swear not!

ERICSSON—

But enter; here we are. . . Listen, a step!
 The steps of two! Ejnar!

EJNAR (*coming up with Boras*)—

Ho! Father, dear:
 Here come we, full of spirits. I am more
 Then ever pledged to brotherhood with him
 Who seeks my sister's hand.
 What! Gerda here!

ERICSSON—

Good evening, Captain Boras! Gerda, come,
 And greet our guest.

GERDA—

I greet you well, good Sir.
 I think we must have met before!
 (*Boras looks hard at Gerda.*)

GERDA (*aside, hearing Helga's voice within*)—

She's here!
 I cannot understand. Am I misled
 By that fair-spoken stranger? If I am,

I'll never trust a man again, except
 Olaf perhaps : I'll lock my secrets up
 Within a breast of ice, and suffer death
 Rather than bare them to a passer-by.

ERICSSON—

Why do you wait ? Come in !

GERDA—

I thank you much,
 But I shall not be really welcome now,
 At such a time as this. I should confound
 Your Helga's judgment, if she had to choose
 Between the love she bears, and the disgrace
 That would confront her were my knowledge hers :
 Good night !

ERICSSON—

A jealous wench ! Where has she met
 This Captain Boras ? But he answered not.
 She has a spiteful tongue. Thank Heaven, her tale
 Died on her lips, nor marred the happy ring
 Of Helga's voice.

GERDA (*hurrying away*)—

I cannot understand . . . !
 A message to the Castle. . . It must say
 That Helga Ericsson is even now
 Plighted in ancient form to Captain . . . There
 I have forgot his name !

I could no more !
 The father did not listen . . . would have lashed
 Me with his tongue were he not Ericsson,
 The ever gentle, ever good. Alas !
 But what care I ?

In honour to my bond,
 Pledged rashly to an unknown flatterer,
 I should have entered, bid the child withdraw
 Her charm from Olaf's heart : then, in revenge,
 Disclosed her lover's shame.

Yet Helga weds
 Not Olaf : but an alien, double-masked,

Perjured and false. Oh bitterly she'll rue
Her fond deceit !

And he ? Not sure, forseeth,
If she yet loves him : when upon the cliff
She hung upon his lips, and breathed her soul
Hot into his !

Olaf, you poor blind boy,
Come back to Gerda, who for all her looks
That cannot rival Helga's (that she knows)
Was never wanton, or hysterical,
But true, and deeply-loving ! Olaf, come !
(*Ericsson, Ejnar and Boras have entered, welcomed by
Helga, who appears to her father to be ill at ease, to
Ejnar and Boras to be shy.*)

BORAS—

Now, with your leave, good Sir, I'll speak my heart.

ERICSSON—

'Tis granted, Boras.
(*recollecting Gerda's words*)
Let the maiden judge
If honour rings there, or if any false
And hollow note resound !

BORAS—

Then here I yield
My heart, my life, my fortune to the maid !
(*to Helga*)
To you, Beloved, I have vowed my all :
Say, can you love me ? Can you lay your hand,
Your tiny hand, within my steady grasp,
And know and feel me true ?
The choice is yours !

HELGA (*strangely moved, turns to her father and catches
at his arm*)—

Father, I cannot answer . . . have no words,
But such as seem ungentle in the eye
Of proffered love. I can anticipate
All he would say to me ; and must confess
I do not love him, nor have given him cause
For such proposals !

ERICSSON—

Daughter, you have met
Upon the windy cliff ! The sea-birds know
Tales of your love, and whisper them to me !

HELGA (*in amazement, and terribly agitated*)—

The only time I ever saw your friend,
Good Captain Boras here, was when we supped
At Vaila's house !

BORAS—

Good maiden, let it pass
That at this early hour you do not love :
For time reveals that love, like fruit, must grow
From small beginnings, needing rain and sun
To swell, to ripen ! So no hurried words—
Assent, or dissent. I would beg your heart
Ponder my suit, and later cast its vote.

HELGA—

Oh, Sir, it cannot be ! My heart is won !

BORAS (*turning to Ericsson*)—

Said I not so to you, Sir ?

EJNAR (*in surprise*)—

Helga, dear !
Your heart is won ! And you have never told
Your own, own brother ? Fie upon you ! Shame,
That you should treat me so !

ERICSSON (*with an effort*)—

My children, go
And hasten supper. When our wants are served,
And hospitality's demand fulfilled,
We may expect less heated argument.

HELGA—

You must excuse me, Father ! While you sup
I must go out and ponder all this coil. . . .
My head is whirling. Nay ! I could not eat !

ERICSSON—

Be it so, then : and when the cooling air

Has stilled the fever of your thoughts, return
And bring us peace again.

Now kiss me, child !

HELGA (*kisses him, sobbing*)—

O Father, dearest Father in the world,
It is no wish to vex, or disobey your will :
But a great love that draws me from your side.
Oh, I will tell you, dear : I will, I will !
But not before a stranger ! Give me time. . . .
One evening's grace . . . an hour to think and
weep. . . .
Oh, Father !

ERICSSON—

Little daughter, tell me all !
Not now, but later ! There !

(*He kisses her again.*)

HELGA—

Till then, good-bye !
(*She runs from the cottage, trying to smile through her
tears : facing the sea she cries—*)

O dear my Love, your Helga has no thought,
No wish for other love than yours.

O Love,
O dear my Love, where'er your life may be
At this dark moment, turn a listening ear
To catch your Helga's sobbing pledge of troth !
I love you to the happy point of tears—
I love you to the anguish point of joy—
I love you to the death ! I swear to be
Yours and yours only !

Wheresoe'er you are,
O spread your spirit over me, and make
My spirit strong to fight for you, and win !
(*She sits down on a rock, and buries her face in her
hands.*)

BORAS (*within the cottage*)—

The truth is borne on me from two-fold source :
The maiden cannot love me.

From the first,
I saw her far-caught look, and straightway knew

She worshipped at a distant shrine.

To-night

Her lips have told me all I felt was true,
Your hand, kind Sir ! I should be worse than knave
Were I to dally with a useless hope :
And so I leave you—wish you well—and beg
You deem me not ungrateful for the course
That honour bids me take !

Ejnar, my lad !

If all goes well, you shall my shipmate be.
Grant me a little space this blow to bear,
These wounds to heal.

My trusty friends, good-bye !

(*He goes out.*)

EJNAR (*following*)—

I will conduct you, lest you lose your way.

(*Ericsson stays brooding over the hearthstone. Enter Helga, calm—her eyes lit with determination. Ericsson does not hear her, till her hand is laid on his head, and she sinks with a caressing gesture to her knees beside him.*)

HELGA—

Father, my heart was ever yours to read—
My will was yours to bend, my hand was yours
To hold and guide.

Yes, verily ; until
Into my heart another eye has looked ;
Another will grips mine ; another hand
Holds mine, ah, unrebuked : and love for him
Who owns them holds my life in thrall,
And yet I love you not one whit the less !

ERICSSON—

Who is it, child ? Your speech torments me !
Quick !
Read me no riddles ! Tell your lover's name !

HELGA—

His name is Laurence Bruce. Yonder he lives
In Muness Castle. Oh, he loves me well. . . .

ERICSSON (*rises, his eyes flashing anger*)—

A Bruce ! A cursed Scot ! A whoreson knave—
A whelp of our hereditary foes !
Never, and never, say I !

Not, though twice,
And thrice, a nobleman, shall Scotland's spawn
Mix with the seed of Haakon !

Helga, know
That if your love is set upon this limb
Of Scottish devilry, which, ages back,
Each generation of our house has fought,
You forfeit love of mine !

Go to your bed !
Go, go, I say ! Nay, whine not at my feet !
Choose which you will, and choose this very night—
Norse, and your home : or Scot, and loveless hell !
To bed, I say !

(*Helga, pale and speechless, rises and passes proudly
from the hearth.*)

SCENE IX

Muness Castle.

The elder Bruce and James Stuart deep in conversation.

STUART—

Each moment is of consequence : one day,
One hour may find the lad beyond you, lost !
But call him here : disclose your loving plans
To make him great ; and cunningly appeal
To the desire for wealth in every man,
And specially in youth, whose veins run hot
With thoughts of power : and that is quickest won,
They know, with gold.

Bruce, it is worth your while
To take the boy as partner to your purse ;
Bestow a fortune on the lad to-day—
Cripple yourself, eviscerate your plans,
And fling your notions, blindly preconceived,
From wisdom's store to falsehood's midden-heap.
Show the boy gold : describe its use to him :
Picture the miserable state of those
Whose keen ambition frets against the chain
Of sordid poverty.

But, as you hope
For triumph, speak not of the other sex !
At least not yet. And if his mind is fixed
Rebel to filial piety : if still
He thinks that he need hold this fisher-girl
More than the plaything of an hour, I'll throw
A final card. And this should well suffice
To crush his spirit : nay, we want not that !
Only to turn his feet from lowly ways
Into the paths of glory.

BRUCE—

Stuart, friend !
 My trusty counsellor, my will must bow
 Before your wisdom and experience.
 Yet does my heart lie heavy in my breast.
 Were I my son—and once I was as he—
 No bribe would turn me from my chosen course.
 If all the passionate love that I have showered
 Upon that only boy avails not now,
 What shall avail ?

STUART—

You ask, then, my advice,
 And will not take it ?

BRUCE—

No, friend, call him in !
(A serving man is despatched, and presently Laurence enters.)

LAURENCE—

You want me, Father ?

BRUCE—

Yes, come in, my boy :
 I do not often talk of those deep thoughts
 That stir within my brain, and while you sleep,
 Goad me to constant wakefulness. But they
 Circle around your life. Your infant birth
 Gave birth to them ; and surely, pace by pace,
 They found fresh strength with every growing year
 Through boyhood to this moment.
 Now they swell
 Fully mature, just as your boyish arm
 Grows conscious of its strength, just as your eye
 Begins to lift for wider vision : yes,
 And as the deeps within you call to deeps
 You know not where.

O Laurence, are you keen
 For enterprise, for danger, for revenge
 On bitter wrongs that I, your sire, have nursed
 Through these long twenty years ?

LAURENCE—

Father, you know
How deeply I have loved you all my life !
And you may feel secure that in your son
The pride of birth that has sustained us both,
The love of home that naught eradicates,
And faith in Scotland, shall empower this hand
To strike a blow for you !

BRUCE—

Then hear my plans !
A way lies open—not to me—but you, to win
Our ancient honour back. 'Twill bring you wealth,
Riches, my boy, the avenue to power !
For what can mortal do if penury
Freeze all the springs of life ?
But granted wealth,
The path is clear to satisfy the will,
And grasp the cherished end.

LAURENCE (*slowly*)—

One end alone
I cherish : I will ask it as a boon,
A small repayment, for my service given,
Nor claim it till the task you set is done.

BRUCE—

Speak freely then, dear son ! What is the boon ?

LAURENCE—

To wed a lovely maid of noble blood.

BRUCE—

Great heavens ! How guessed you this—my silent
wish !

LAURENCE—

Is that your wish ? Unknowingly you win
What brings us both pure joy : for I have found,
Aye, woo'd and won, a maid of blood as rich
As we ourselves can boast ; and beautiful
As summer on the moors !

BRUCE (*to Stuart, with a chuckle*)—

Stuart, you dog !
 You have been playing double with me, eh ?
 You have purloined the eggs, and hatched them out
 Under my very nose !

Why do you scowl ?

STUART—Reason enough ! Bruce, are you mad ? The
 boy

Knows nothing of your plan, but hatches out
 Eggs of his own, and plans that ruin yours !

LAURENCE (*turning to Stuart*)—

Be good enough to leave us, Cousin James :
 No friend are you to me, nor I dare swear
 Too friendly to my father ! Long ago
 I saw you thwarted me, and ground your axe
 Upon my father's grindstone. So begone !

STUART (*in anger*)—

Puppy, be silent ! Hand in hand we work—
 Your sire and I : and if we thwart your will,
 'Tis for your good. The maid you chase
 Is no fit wife for you !

BRUCE—

What maid ? Her name ?
 Have you known, Stuart, more than you would tell ?

STUART—

Some village st—

LAURENCE (*flinging himself on Stuart*)—

Begone, you lying cur !
 Get from this room, or, by a Bruce's blood,
 My father's friend shall learn he has a son !
 (*Stuart draws back.*)
 Father, I love a maid of royal stock—
 Helga of Woodwick. True, her blood is Norse,
 But

BRUCE—

Norse ! of noble stock ! a race of swine !
 Fool that I am ! O fond and trusting fool !
 Stuart, I should have asked you here before
 To check this madness of my boy, and mine. . . .

LAURENCE—

Father ! You take his side ? You count his help
 To gain your ends more precious than my love ?
 For I have ever loved you, served you : yea,
 Will serve you still.

Yet Nature cannot change—
 Love cannot swing away from plighted troth :
 And I love Helga ! I have told her so !
 And she loves me. I will wed her, none else !

STUART (*advancing with a slip of paper in his hand*)—

Hold one short moment ! Foolish you, and young :
 Nor know the wiles of women.

Helga plays,
 Fools with your heart, and trifles with your love
 For just as long as suits her. I have proof
 That even now your fancy-maid is pledged
 To wed another with outlandish rites,
 Self-plighted to a merchant from the sea,
 Whose huckster's trade has gotten him the pelf
 That solves a father's doubts, and women's vows.

LAURENCE (*white with rage, snatches at the paper*)—

You lie again, you cur : where is your proof ?
 (*he reads the signature, before Stuart can recover the note.*)

You lie, you lie, you lie !

Father, one word !

My side, or his ? I wait, I wait. . . .

BRUCE—

Know well

You never gain consent for this from me !
 Give up this maid ! We have a bride for you—
 Will bring you honour and restore our House !

LAURENCE (*passionately*)—

What ! Marry one I know not ? There's one thing
And only one makes wedlock, and the thought
Of union bearable : and that is love.
For love I'll wed or not at all. . . .

BRUCE—

A blight

Fall on your ranting mouth ! A son of mine,
And thus to rail against me ! Did I get,
And tend, aye, pamper you, only to reap
Curst disobedience and disloyalty ?
See you not, boy, a thousand hopes are gone
If you persist ? A life-time's plans annulled ?
Your father's honour trampled in the mud
Before his mocking foes ? A curse on you !
May hell receive you and your paramour. . . .

LAURENCE—

Curse as you list, you shall not change my will !
My love for Helga utterly transcends
Your mind's best flight in gibe and loathsome taunt.
This is my home no more !

BRUCE—

You speak the truth :

Not one night more I harbour such a knave
Within these walls ! Go, lest I summon here
Those who shall scourge you !

Listen, one more chance

Is yours : give up this low-born peasant girl,
And take a Scottish bride—a fortune win !

LAURENCE—

I cannot . . . will not ! Rather, take good-bye !
If love were love, Father would stand by son
Where son is free to choose, as son will stand
By father in all else. If love be love
Helga still loves me, nor can break her vows
Even were Cousin James himself to lay
Siege to her unsuspecting heart ! Good-bye !

(He rushes out, and walks over the moor in an access of rage, unbelief and despair. At length he throws himself on the heather and lies staring at the sky. By and bye he grows calmer, and says softly—)

Alternate star and cloud :
 The breezes whisper through age-seared grass :
 The voice of the sea is calling aloud :
 The storm-wrack veils the west in a shroud,
 And night's strange foot-falls pass.

Alternate cloud and star !
 Oh steadily must affection shine
 As each glowing world of God's afar :
 And never a threatening cloud must bar
 My Helga's heart from mine !

(Rising to his feet, he returns to the Castle, and later, heavily cloaked, he sets out to find Helga.)

SCENE X

(*Colliasta Geo.*)

The moon breaks through the clouds. Laurence finds Helga lying shaken with sobs. He approaches her tenderly.

LAURENCE—

Helga, beloved! weep not so! 'Tis I,
Your Laurence! I am standing at your side.
Now suffer me to raise you in my arms:
Rest your head here, and let love's magic soothe
And still your grief: and turn your tear-drenched
eyes

That I may kiss them. And between your tears
Just tell me that you love me!

I love you

As sea loves sky, as flowers the sun . . . as . . .
ah!

There is no language of the heart save this, sweet
maid!

Closer—yes nestle closer: for my arm
Is strong, and firm: it never knew its strength
Till it had you to hold, protect and guard.
What is your grief, and who your enemy?
A name, a hint, a word from you, and I,
I, Laurence Bruce, will make him rue the hour
When his foul brain conceived the thought of harm
To one I hold supremely, finally mine!
Stay, stay those sobs that choke, and choking, tear
Your poor heart into shreds. I feel it beat
In terrible misrule! Helga my own,
See, I will move these cumbering wraps aside
That it may speak to mine, from mine may draw
Deep draughts of consolation!

Can it be

That I, unfortunate, have been the cause

Of your sharp anguish ? Has my headlong march
 Into the country of your soul, that seemed
 To offer royal welcome, brought distress
 And all this shame upon you ?

There, dear, there !
 That was the last sob, was it not ?

Now smile,
 Smile with that angel's face that draws the world
 And all its beauty surging to your feet !
 You need not say " I love you " ; for I know !

HELGA—

O dearest man of all the world of men,
 O truest lover in the multitudes
 Of loving and beloved, shall I not wound
 Your tender passion if I tell my woe ?
 Shall I not forfeit all my little heaven
 In losing all my earth ? And shall I not
 (*She hesitates*)

LAURENCE—

Speak on and fear not, Helga : for the roots
 Of passion and of reverence strike so deep
 That each attempt to tear them from the soil
 Of natural love and longing only serves
 To forge fresh tentacles, that grimly cling
 And grip the rocks below.

HELGA—

An outcast I
 This very evening from my home and hearth :
 And all because I wed not at the choice
 Of those who loved me ere our hearts were joined.
 My father, ever proudly fond of me,
 And dear to me as nothing else, save you,
 Most bitterly reviled you : bade me go
 And in the solitude of evening choose
 Your love or his : a suitor strange, or you !
 For face to face with one he had brought
 To claim my hand in marriage, I confessed
 My love for you. And though in all the years
 From childhood up he never spoke a word

In aught but loving tenderness to me,
His baby Helga, yet he wildly raged
And swore that this should never be.

But I

Know well that he will never find a man
To guard and love me better ! Laurence, once,
Once I have made my choice : and should life start
Fresh from to-day, I would choose this, and this !
Dear Lover, you shall vanquish all, and hold
Me yours for ever !

LAURENCE—

Hear you my heart exulting next to yours ?
Hear you it thundering in its mighty joy ;
And giving love for love, and grief for grief,
And sacrifice for sacrifice ?

Now raise

Your lips to mine, and take my brimming cup
Of consecration to them !

Helga, know

That we are one in sorrow, as just now
We lingered on the heather one in joy.
What matters it to us if fathers, friends,
Aye home, and all home means, are lost,
If but we keep each other to the end of time !

HELGA (*in astonishment*)

What say you, Lawrence ? Ah, your troubled voice,
Your whole self speaks to me of pain ? Have you,
You too, my dearest, passed through grief's white
fire ?

I'll take you to my breast, and comfort you !
Yes, tell me all ; your love has made me strong
To bear it.

LAURENCE—

Helga, hear the bitter truth !

We have been spied upon, and quick betrayed.
My father in his rage disowns me—bids
Me marry whom he wills—and calls our love
Harsh names. Our love runs counter to his plans,
And dashes Stuart's hopes. Together they

Conspire against you, seek to harm you ; say
Your troth is plighted to another.

Love !

I claimed the right to choose my bride, and lost !
So I shall take it, spite of them : and choose
You, my sweet Helga ; you, and you, and you !
But oh, my father !
(*He flings himself down in a storm of sorrow.*)

HELGA—

Listen, dearest one.
Your grief is also mine : and my poor heart
Bleeds drop for drop with yours !

LAURENCE—

Outcasts are we !
Flung rudely from our homes ; but love shall save
And land us safely on a happy shore !

HELGA—

How it has come about I know not !

LAURENCE—

Wait !
Know you the name of Gerda ?

HELGA—

Gerda, yes :
Gerda of Norwick.

LAURENCE—

It was she who wrote
To cousin James to say you played me false.

HELGA—

I'll not believe it !

LAURENCE—

But I saw the name,
Gerda of Norwick.

HELGA—

Why ! I never spoke

An angry word to her. And yet I know
 I never wholly liked her. Gerda ! how
 Could she be happier betraying me ?

(She weeps afresh.)

LAURENCE—

O Helga, little Helga, give not way
 To all your grief again ; I master mine !
 I put my father, house and all aside,
 And live for you !

HELGA—

But surely you will rue
 This desperate move. Oh, Laurence, is my love
 So much to you ?

LAURENCE—

Helga, your love is all !
 To keep it with the loss of everything,
 Aye, even life, were good as life to me.

HELGA—

I'll keep this great, great treasure of your love
 For evermore !

LAURENCE—

We'll never part again :
 Rejoice, dear heart, that we are ever one !
 We'll go away and build ourselves a nest
 On some far magic isle ! Where is your boat ?
 This very night we'll sail : we'll leave the world
 And all its cruelty behind.

Sweet Helga, say,
 Can you entrust yourself to me ?

HELGA—

My love,
 I know to what this great adventure leads :
 It brings fulfilment of our hearts' desire !
 Kiss me again, and know that I resign
 All sovereignty of self to better hands :
 My future hopes and longings turn to you !

LAURENCE—

Oh, to have won you, glorious, beautiful !
I in return do swear henceforth to be
Your husband, tender, true.

Now come, my love,
We'll sail into the distance, there to find
One who will wed us. Little do we care
What land it is—it will be nearer heaven
Than we have ever been before !

HELGA—

My love !
But listen to the moaning of the sea !
We cannot go to-night. The clouds are black ;
And all this eve the point was white with gulls,
Telling of storms : we cannot go to-night !

LAURENCE—

But they will seek you : they will look for me,
And finding us will tear our heart in twain.
Oh, Helga, do you fear ?

HELGA—

How can you ask !
No terrors has the sea for me, its child—
I love its every mood. Yet must we haste
And seek in Yell a haven for the night.

LAURENCE—

My bright and splendid maiden !
(*They find the Bonxie, get her ready, and put out to sea.*)

LAURENCE—

Hark how the wind is sobbing on the sea !
No ! it is you ! Why weep you, Helga ?

HELGA—

Ah !
That I must leave my father and my home ;
My dear and lovely Woodwick. O good-bye,
Good-bye, dear isle, where childhood spent its days
In purest happiness !

LAURENCE—

See, I have brought
But grief into your life !

HELGA—

No, Laurence, no !
Henceforth you are my happiness, my life !
Now let me take the helm. I know the tides,
I understand the winds : and oft have steered
My father home from fishing when the skies
Grew dark and angry. I have baffled winds
And waves and tides, and now am glad and proud
To tame them to your will !

LAURENCE—

The sky is dark,
But presently a dawning sun shall break
And warm us with its love !
(*The wind freshens.*)

HELGA—

I do not like
The gathering tempest !

LAURENCE—

O my love, fear not !
For are we not together, you and I ?
Never a parting, but the voyage goes
On, and still on, Belovèd, endlessly.
(*The tumult increases : rain and wind buffet the little boat.*)

HELGA—

O dear my love ! these wilful elements
Seem bent on mischief ! All my being feels
Trouble is near : and this long-trusted boat—
My Bonxie that has never played me false—
Is trembling to her keel ! The rudder cries
Aloud for mercy : and the darkness grows :
I know not where we are ! . . .
Laurence, O hold,
Hold the sheet fast ! Another gust like that

Will bring us into peril dire : the boat
Can stand no more !

LAURENCE—

We are together, love,
For life or death : so let us bravely face
The worst that fate can do. Gladly I'd leave
My post to hold you close ! Yet we must make
Some shore of safety from the turbulent sea !
To pass from life when life has just begun
Anew in love were life's worst irony !

HELGA—

Dear little boat, that sturdily hast borne
My maiden heart across the silver seas—
In whose safe bosom I have lain asleep
Whilst time and tide swept by me—strive, my boat,
My sea-bird swift. Not for my sake alone,
For now my maiden heart has passed away,
And in its stead I bear a treasure great,
The great and goodly honour of a man
Who loves and loves me !

Strive, my gallant boat !

LAURENCE—

I hear the breakers thundering on the crags.

HELGA—

I feel the tempest gathering for its spring !
(*The squall catches them.*)
Ah, Laurence, Laurence ! That was terrible !
Do we still float, or sink ?

And now, and now . . .
The rudder's gone. O love, our hope is lost !
O take me close and never loose your hold !

LAURENCE—

Be brave, maid Helga !

O ! the sail, the sail !
Alas, the chilly gust benumbed my hands
And flashed the sheet away ere I could close

My failing grip—and there it sadly streams
A ribbened flag ! I cannot find the oars !

HELGA—

Ah, lover, hold me—never mind the cars—

LAURENCE—

There, dearest, all the help I have is yours ;
I love you and I love you !

But I'll seek
The oars again, for now the waters pour
Over the side : the oars will keep her right. . . .
O God ! 'tis vain !

HELGA—

Belovèd, come to me !
Your love has calmed my spirit, and I want
You to be near, my love, my life, my all !

LAURENCE—

I come, belovèd.
(*They cling in rapture and despair.*)

HELGA—

There is peace within ;
O kiss and kiss me !

LAURENCE—

Helga, sweet, my soul
Knows but the intermingling of itself with you !
What is this life ? What death ? Let breakers roar
In devilish fury, you and I are borne
Far up into the bosom of the heavens
Where life and death are one. I cannot see
Those love-filled eyes, but know that in their depth
There is no fear of death ! The night is wild,
But day, the fearless soul's bright endless day,
Will dawn !

HELGA—

My Bridegroom, I am not afraid
For you will hold me till that morning dawn.
(*She springs up suddenly.*)

Laurence, the Holms ! The Holms of Woodwick !
 See
 The archway, and the fury of the seas—
 The white foam dashing through.

O love, my love,
 Here is our grave ! How near, how far it lies—
 Only a hand's breadth from my island home !
 Belovèd, rise, and take me in your arms
 Once, just once more, before the hungry waves
 So cold, so cruel, close above our heads !

LAURENCE—

'Tis done ; my Bride for evermore !

HELGA—

My great
 And glorious Bridegroom !

LAURENCE—

One more kiss !

HELGA—

One more !

LAURENCE—

O Life !

HELGA—

O Death !

BOTH (*together*)—

O Love !

THE END.

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